



# **Plan for Employment of People with Disabilities**

**U.S. Department of Education**

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

INTRODUCTION .....	1
RECRUITMENT AND PLACEMENT .....	2
EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS .....	6
PROJECTED HIRING PLAN .....	8
CAREER DEVELOPMENT .....	9
MONITORING AND EVALUATING PROGRESS .....	11
REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS .....	12

## INTRODUCTION

The economic prosperity in the United States at the dawn of the 21st century abounds with scientific and technological advances that are giving rise to new industries and occupations unheard of only a decade ago. As these advances occur, new employment opportunities are becoming plentiful. However, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management indicates that the majority of working-age individuals with significant disabilities have not shared in this employment prosperity.

As a federal employer, the Department of Education (ED) has an obligation to be a model employer of individuals with disabilities, and to comply with Management Directives issued by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

On July 25, 2000, the President signed an Executive Order to increase the employment opportunities for persons with disabilities at all levels and occupations in the federal government. This plan describes the Department's efforts to support the President's goals by:

- Recruiting widely for positions at all levels utilizing a recruitment plan;
- Providing opportunities for students with disabilities at the Department and in collaboration with colleges and universities;
- Giving full consideration to employees with disabilities for inclusion in developmental opportunities;
- Collecting and maintaining data to monitor success;
- Providing reasonable accommodations for qualified applicants and employees with disabilities, consistent with guidance from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; and,
- Providing appropriate training to senior leadership and managers to ensure they understand both the commitment of the Department to employ individuals with disabilities and knowledge of special programs to recruit, appoint, and ensure that reasonable accommodations are provided for qualified applicants and employees with disabilities, consistent with EEOC guidance.

## RECRUITMENT AND PLACEMENT

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*Recruit widely for positions at all levels of the Department's workforce, including GS-13 to 15, Senior Executive Service, and other senior levels.*

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### Recruitment Strategies

In developing recruitment strategies for people with disabilities, the Department will recruit widely, utilizing State and local vocational rehabilitation agencies, and develop collaborative efforts with community outreach groups. By working together, we will maximize the use of resources to attract highly qualified persons with disabilities at all levels.

The Department of Education will consider Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and other agency best practices for successful recruitment of people with disabilities for possible application at the Department. We will also share successful approaches with others, through the Human Resources Management Council and other venues, so that other federal departments and agencies may benefit from our experiences.

The Department provides a host of work-life programs and initiatives that offer flexibility and support for employees to balance the needs of the workplace with the rest of their lives. Many of these programs and flexibilities will also assist ED in recruiting people with disabilities. Alternative work schedules, flexiplace, job sharing, and part-time employment are all possible options within the Department.

The Department recently established a new position at headquarters within the Office of Management, Human Resources Group, devoted to diversity recruitment and other special programs. This Special Programs Recruiter will conduct workforce representation analysis, develop recruitment strategies, and establish contacts with external recruitment sources to reach diverse audiences. Recruitment of people with disabilities will be an important aspect of the responsibilities of this position.

ED will update employment information and recruitment materials to improve access to information for people with disabilities. All information posted on ED's Internet site is reviewed for screen-reader compatibility. This assistive technology for visually impaired individuals translates written material into spoken words. Information is also available in alternate formats, such as large print, audiocassette, Braille, and computer disk.

Consistent with applicable legal considerations, the Department will consider recruiting from all sources when filling positions, including those in the Senior Executive Service and managerial and supervisory positions at grades GS-13 to 15, in an effort to attract a more diverse applicant pool, including candidates with disabilities.

ED will develop a variety of resources and networks to enhance opportunities for employment and assist in actively recruiting people with disabilities. Some existing resources that ED will continue to use are:

- State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies (SVRAs) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are excellent potential recruitment sources. They provide counseling, evaluation, training and other services to individuals with disabilities, including disabled veterans. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies can assist with information regarding accommodations, effective retention strategies, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance, and sensitivity training for ED offices. They play a critical role in certification of candidates for applicable Schedule A appointing authorities.
- The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) provides expert accommodation information before, during, and after the recruitment process. JAN is a confidential service that allows any manager or employee to receive individualized information on his or her accommodation issue. It is managed by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (PCEPD), who may be reached at (800) 526-7234.
- The Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities (WRP) is a source of candidates for federal employment opportunities. The WRP is managed by the PCEPD and the Department of Defense. It is a resource used to connect public or private sector employers nationwide with highly motivated post-secondary students and recent graduates with disabilities. The WRP seeks to: (1) provide college students with disabilities the opportunity to obtain summer employment that may lead to permanent employment in the federal or private sector; and (2) break down attitudinal barriers held by employers and co-workers by demonstrating that people with disabilities can work successfully in a variety of jobs. The Department has employed summer interns through the WRP for over six years, and plans to continue using the WRP as a source of candidates for temporary and permanent positions.
- Project ABLE is a national résumé bank that provides employers an easily accessible applicant pool of qualified job-ready individuals. The résumé bank operates through the joint efforts of OPM, Social Security Administration (SSA), Rehabilitation Services Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies. The goal is to provide employers convenient access to quality human resources while providing training and employment services to eligible people with disabilities.
- OPM developed a very useful Internet site (<http://www.opm.gov/disability>) that provides the latest information on employment of people with disabilities in the federal government, links to job listings, information on reasonable accommodation, health-related issues and other topics. This web site serves as a valuable resource for employees, job candidates, managers, and Human Resources professionals.

The Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) provides federal

funds in support of the Projects with Industry (PWI) program, the Centers for Independent Living program (CILs) and the Migrant Seasonal Farm Workers Program (MSFW). Individuals receiving services from these programs are not always clients of State Vocational Rehabilitation Services programs. Often times, through the provision of independent living services, individuals with severe disabilities can reach a level of employment. ED will explore opportunities for outreach and collaboration with RSA-supported organizations, including rehabilitation programs for Native Americans, to develop additional recruiting resources to improve employment opportunities for persons with disabilities at the Department. ED will ensure that RSA state agencies understand the types of jobs for which the Department is recruiting and that they receive timely information on job openings.

The Department shares the concerns of the rehabilitation community regarding employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities who are also members of a racial or ethnic minority group. In the context of EEOC directives and the Department's Affirmative Employment Plan, ED will seek collaborative recruiting relationships with community and governmental groups to improve outreach and access to employment opportunities for minority individuals with disabilities.

The Department will use the Internet to assist in recruiting individuals with disabilities and raising awareness of the Department as an employer. Internally, ED will use its Intranet and e-mail systems to publicize diversity recruitment initiatives, including the employment of people with disabilities, and post related reports on the web.

ED will continue to educate and train managers and supervisors on various hiring programs and resources available for recruiting, promoting, and retaining employees with disabilities. ED also offers a training module on reasonable accommodation and the employment of people with disabilities that confers credit toward the Department's managerial core curriculum training requirements.

### **Vacancy Announcements**

ED currently uses and will continue to use plain language in vacancy announcements stating that the Department will make reasonable accommodations for qualified applicants or employees with disabilities, except when doing so would pose an undue hardship on ED. Vacancy announcements are posted on the Internet. In addition, ED will use targeted outreach and advertising through various media, as appropriate to the staffing situation.

### **Special Appointing Authorities**

ED will continue to take advantage of the special appointing authorities available when employing people with disabilities. These special appointing authorities include:

- **Schedule A, 5 CFR 213.3102(II), for hiring readers, interpreters, and personal assistants.** This excepted authority is used to appoint readers, interpreters, and personal assistants for employees with severe disabilities.

- **Schedule A, 5 CFR 213.3102(t), for hiring people with mental retardation.** This excepted authority is used to appoint persons with cognitive disabilities (mental retardation). They may qualify for conversion to permanent status after two years of satisfactory service.
- **Schedule A, 5 CFR 213.3102(u), for hiring people with severe physical disabilities.** This excepted authority is used to appoint persons with severe physical disabilities who have demonstrated satisfactory performance through a temporary appointment, or have been certified as likely to succeed in performing the duties of the job. After two years of satisfactory service, they may qualify for conversion to permanent status.
- **Schedule A, 5 CFR 213.3102(gg), for hiring people with psychiatric disabilities.** This excepted authority is used to appoint persons who have demonstrated their ability to perform satisfactorily under a temporary appointment or who are certified as likely to be able to perform the essential functions of the job, with or without reasonable accommodation. Upon completion of two years of satisfactory service under this authority, the employee can be converted to competitive status.
- **5 CFR 315.604 for hiring disabled veterans enrolled in a VA training program.** This authority is used to hire veterans with disabilities who are eligible for training under the VA vocational rehabilitation program (38 U.S.C. chapter 31). The veterans may enroll for training or work experience at an agency under the terms of an agreement between the agency and VA. While enrolled in the VA program the veterans are not federal employees for most purposes, but are beneficiaries of the VA. Upon successful completion, the host agency and VA give the veterans Certificates of Training showing the occupational series and grade levels of the positions for which trained. The Certificates of Training allows any agency to appoint the veterans non-competitively under a status quo appointment that may be converted to permanent status at any time.
- **5 CFR 316.201(b) for hiring worker-trainees for programs such as the Welfare to Work program.** On March 8, 1997, the President directed federal agencies to expand the use of the worker-trainee authority, under TAPER (temporary appointment pending establishment of a register) and other excepted service hiring authorities to appoint welfare recipients to entry-level positions. Accordingly, ED may utilize the worker-trainee authority as an additional tool to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities under the Welfare to Work program.
- **5 CFR 316.302(b)(4) and 5 CFR 316.402(b)(4) for hiring 30 percent or more disabled veterans.** These authorities are used to hire veterans who are 30 percent or more disabled under temporary appointments of more than 60 days, or term appointments. The veterans must have retired from active military service with a 30 percent or more disability rating, or be rated by the VA within the preceding year as having a compensable service-connected disability of 30 percent or more. They may be converted to permanent status at any time during the appointment.

## EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

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*Provide opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in internship and student employment programs.*

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In addition to other appointing authorities listed previously in this plan, the Department of Education (ED) will continue to employ students with disabilities through student employment programs and will ensure greater emphasis on employment strategies to recruit students with disabilities.

ED currently uses the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) and offers employment opportunities to some students with disabilities through this program. While continuing to use the STEP, the Department will also seek opportunities to implement a Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) component to complement disability and diversity recruitment efforts.

ED participates in the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP), described above, and has employed students with disabilities in many offices throughout the Department. ED will continue to participate in this program and will work to achieve its goal of hiring more students through this program over the next five years. Managers will be encouraged to use the WRP database to fill permanent positions as well as temporary positions, as many of the candidates are completing college or graduate degrees and are seeking permanent positions.

ED will improve awareness of student employment programs to managers and supervisors as additional avenues to attract students with disabilities to the Department's workforce.

ED will take advantage of the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) leadership role in identifying accredited schools and programs with a high concentration of students with disabilities, and will explore tailoring OPM master cooperative education agreements for use at ED.

The Presidential Management Intern (PMI) Program is a two-year, entry-level career development and training program designed to attract masters and doctoral students in a variety of academic disciplines. ED will continue to participate in the PMI program and seek additional opportunities to employ graduate students with disabilities. Upon successful completion of the two-year internship, PMIs are eligible for permanent status.

ED will improve outreach efforts through campus visits and targeting of professional organizations and publications serving the interests of people with disabilities. ED will provide staff members (particularly those with disabilities) to participate in campus visits to recruit students with disabilities through the WRP.



The new Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP) should offer additional employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. OPM is currently developing interim regulations on the operation of this new program. ED will explore how the FCIP might help to support all Departmental employment diversity initiatives.

## Projected Hiring Plan

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*The Department is committed to improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities across all career fields and grade levels.*

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### Recruitment Planning

The President's Executive Order challenges the federal government to hire 100,000 people with disabilities over the next five years. The Department is enthusiastic in supporting the President's goal. However, the Department of Education (ED) is not a large organization when compared with many federal agencies, and the Department's workforce is relatively stable. These two factors serve to limit the scope of hiring opportunities at ED, including hiring to improve representation of individuals with disabilities at the Department. Workforce demographics indicate many current employees will become eligible to retire within the next five years. Individual employees' decisions to retire may result in somewhat greater turnover at ED than in the past. In any case, the Department is committed to improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities across all career fields and grade levels.

Including temporary, student and summer hires, it is anticipated that ED will hire approximately 2,145 new employees over the next five years. Of this total, it is the Department's goal to hire approximately 250 to 300 individuals with disabilities (about 11 to 14 percent of new hires). The following job series have the greatest potential for placement opportunities: GS-101, GS-301, GS-303, GS-326, GS-334, GS-343, GS-360, GS-510, GS-905, GS-1101, GS-1102, and GS-1720. As a goal, ED efforts to recruit individuals with disabilities will be well distributed across the following series and grades:

Title	Series	Grades
Vocational Rehabilitation Program Specialist	GS-101	12/13/14/15
General Administration	GS-301	11/12/13
Misc. Clerk and Assistant	GS-303	4/5/6/7
Office Automation Clerk	GS-326	4/5/6
Computer Specialist	GS-334	11/12/13
Management or Program Analyst	GS-343	11/12/13
Equal Opportunity Specialist	GS-360	11/12/13
Accountant	GS-510	9/11/12
Attorney	GS-905	11/12/13
General Business and Industry	GS-1101	9/11/12
Contract Specialist	GS-1102	5/7/9/11/12
Education Program Specialist	GS-1720	11/12/13
All others	Various	GS-5/15; SES; AD

## CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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*Give full consideration to employees with disabilities for inclusion in developmental opportunities designed to enhance their leadership skills and to advance their careers.*

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The Department of Education (ED) has been proactive in ensuring that persons with disabilities have equal access to all leadership and career development opportunities available to employees. The Department has also played a leadership role in encouraging other federal agencies to implement strategies to ensure that employees with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate in all learning activities. Examples of strategies used by the Department include the following:

- Working closely with providers of on-site training (contractors and vendors of off-the-shelf courses) to ensure they are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Any training conducted at the Department must allow all employees to be able to participate fully in the training, and course materials must be made available in alternate formats (Braille workbooks, closed-captioned videos, etc.).
- Ensuring managers are offered specific courses, such as Disability Access Workshops, where managers are provided with information and skills to hire and supervise employees with disabilities (available at headquarters and in the regions). They learn to ensure that the workplace is accessible and how to assess the ability of a potential employee with disabilities to perform the essential functions of the job. They also learn about the reasonable accommodation program and requirements of the Rehabilitation Act.
- Working with providers of software and on-line training to ensure that all courses available to Department employees through the Intranet/Internet meet stringent standards of accessibility.
- Taking a leadership role in advocating disability awareness to other government agencies and non-government groups. The Department serves on interagency committees and has had representatives address forums attended by federal agencies and providers of software to demonstrate accessibility issues and emphasize the need for making all on-line courses accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Sponsoring a mentoring program and encouraging all employees to participate. Individuals with disabilities are participating as mentorees and are paired with more senior employees, managers, and executives to enhance interpersonal skills and gain organizational information. Persons with disabilities are also participating as mentors and thereby serve as role models, advisors, and confidants. Mentors work with the mentorees to help build self-confidence, expand individual awareness, and provide insights and new perspectives on the organization.

- Supporting a system that allows all employees the opportunity to develop new skills through details in other parts of the organization. The Mobility Assignment Program (MAP) provides competitive opportunities for individuals to be detailed to other parts of the Department where they can gain new skills and new perspectives and knowledge of the organization.
- Providing professional career counseling services to all employees to assist with assessment of job skills, work related skills building, as well as personal and professional goal setting. One staff counselor is capable of communicating with hearing impaired employees through the use of sign language. Counselors conduct workshops or work with individuals one-on-one as needed on topics such as résumé writing, interviewing techniques, and individual development planning.

## MONITORING AND EVALUATING PROGRESS

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### *Monitor success in increasing the applicant pool of individuals with disabilities in the Department's recruitment efforts*

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The Department of Education (ED) realizes that effective efforts to change workforce demographics require valid data, data-driven decisions, leadership, and management accountability. The Department's Office of Management, Equal Employment Opportunity Group (EEOG), regularly monitors ED's data concerning workforce composition, as set forth in EEOC Management Directives. The EEOG has implemented an automated analysis tool that provides efficient long-term tracking of employment data and trends. Periodic review of this data will determine if ED is making progress toward achieving greater employment of people with disabilities in support of the President's Executive Order. The Special Programs Recruiter in the Office of Management, Human Resources Group, will maintain contact with the EEOG to ensure ED recruiting and retention strategies are developed in response to actual workforce diversity data. Senior Officers will be advised periodically of the progress within their respective Principal Offices.

The ED General Performance Appraisal System includes a required performance element on workforce diversity for all supervisors. During performance reviews, efforts by managers and supervisors to achieve diversity in their organizations are considered--including efforts to hire people with disabilities.

## REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

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*Provide reasonable accommodations for qualified applicants and employees with disabilities, consistent with guidance from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.*

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A reasonable accommodation is an adjustment or alteration that enables a qualified person with a disability to apply for a job, perform job duties, or enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment. In accordance with applicable law, regulation, Executive Orders, and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission directives, the Department of Education (ED) will continue to make reasonable accommodations for qualified persons with disabilities, unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the Department.

The concept of reasonable accommodation applies to all aspects of employment, including recruitment, training, promotion, reassignment, and developmental assignments. The Office of Management, Work/Life Programs Group, serves as the coordinator and provides assistance with reasonable accommodations. The Work/Life Programs Group maintains a central fund for reasonable accommodations and helps managers and employees interpret and apply accommodation policies and procedures. In addition, the Department provides funds to enable readers, interpreters, personal assistants and job coaches to be hired with the approval of managers.

The Department publishes a host of disability access resources on its web sites and in a brochure, including information and contacts for reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. A number of services for accommodations and general access needs are listed on the Department's web sites:

- The Office of the Chief Information Officer has established an Assistive Technology Team that offers computer needs assessments and assistive technology for reasonable accommodations and program accessibility. The Team also tests computer software for accessibility to disabled individuals.
- The Department's Assistive Technology Center showcases emerging and existing technology solutions to assist individuals with disabilities. The Center provides periodic demonstrations of new products where employees and supervisors may see real solutions in action.
- The Department provides Computer Assisted Real-time Transcription (CART) Services to improve access to meetings or events for deaf or hearing-impaired people.
- The Department provides sign language or oral interpreting services for employees or for public events.

- The Department's Alternate Format Center produces documents in Braille, audiotape, and other alternate formats.
- The Department provides services for closed- or open-captioning of videotapes, broadcast events, or live satellite feeds. All ED videos must be captioned.
- Portable Assistive Listening Systems provide access to meetings, training, or large events for hearing-impaired people in the Washington, DC, headquarters and the regions. In addition, permanent systems are installed in the Departmental Auditorium and in the Secretary's Conference Room.
- The Department provides NexTalk (TTY/TDD) for the deaf and hard of hearing in all customer service call centers.

As an additional avenue to raise awareness within ED, the Department sponsors the Disability Action Forum, a yearlong series of speakers who offer their insights on living and working with a disability. Transcripts of the meetings are posted on the Intranet to provide information to employees who may not have been able to attend the event.

Accommodations are determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the applicant or employee, the specific disability and existing limitations, the essential functions of the particular job, the work environment, and the effectiveness of the proposed accommodation. The cost of a job or work environment accommodation can often be minimal. As noted above, separate centralized funding has been allocated for readers, interpreters, personal assistants, and job coaches to remove a potential budget disincentive. The applicant or employee is always consulted before an accommodation is made.

Information and policy on reasonable accommodations and related support services are available on the Department's web pages. In addition, the Department is in the process of developing a handbook on reasonable accommodation, including policy and procedures. During orientation all new employees receive information on resources available for reasonable accommodation. The Section 504 coordinator in the Work/Life Programs Group is available to assist anyone in need. As discussed earlier in the section on Career Development, the Disability Access Workshops provide training to help raise awareness of managers and supervisors and provide helpful resources on reasonable accommodation.

The Department is committed to providing access to its activities for all people. Reasonable accommodation is an important part of this commitment.